

Maiju Hietala

# THE ROLE OF MUSIC IN TONI MORRISON'S JAZZ

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# ABSTRACT

Maiju Hietala: The Role of Music in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*  
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This thesis analyses the role of music in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*, and shows it has two distinct roles within the novel: firstly, portraying music in the role of representing African American freedom and self-expression, and secondly, to represent music as a tool to portray stigmatization and racism as it appears in 1920s Harlem. This thesis illustrates these two roles by dividing freedom into individual freedom and group freedom and discussing internalized racist attitudes and the aspect of stigmatization through the negative effects that music has for the characters in the novel.

The theoretical framework of this thesis includes insight into the role of music in African American history, as well as its relation to stigmatization. The theoretical framework is also comprised of history of the Harlem Renaissance and the Jazz Age, to illustrate how these periods in African American history show themselves in the novel in relation to the theme of music.

The main find of this thesis is that music plays two distinct roles in *Jazz*; Multiple examples in *Jazz* lend themselves to the conclusion that the novel's characters experience music in two ways during their lives in Harlem during the Jazz Age. Music is thus used to portray the positive and negative aspects of African American life during this period.

Keywords: toni morrison, jazz, music, freedom, self-expression, stigmatization

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## 1. Introduction

The start of the twentieth century saw the beginning of the Harlem Renaissance and the Jazz Age. Jazz music was not only becoming increasingly popular in the United States, but it was also strongly connected to black political movements of the 1920s and 30s; many poets and jazz musicians of the Harlem Renaissance were involved with political issues, and the issues were reflected in their work (Vincent 106-7). The Jazz Age saw, for example, black female musicians singing about black experiences and oppression for the first time, which allowed for a contrast to the stereotypes and depictions of black experiences at the time (Vincent 14).

Toni Morrison's *Jazz* (1992) is set in Harlem during the 1920s. The novel reflects the realities of the Jazz Age with its depiction of black freedom and struggle as it relates to music. Violet and Joe Trace, as well as Joe's young lover Dorcas, are among the African American population that migrated to the city at the start of the century, and the novel mostly circles around their lives years after the event. This thesis will analyse how *Jazz* depicts the role of jazz music in these characters' lives during this time. This thesis argues that music has two visible roles in the novel: it expresses African American freedom and self-expression in the city, as well as the simultaneous stigmatisation of black people and culture.

The theoretical framework of this thesis consists of historical accounts of the Jazz Age and the Harlem Renaissance as they relate to black culture and politics. It discusses music in African American history and the role of jazz music in the 1920s. The theme of music in *Jazz* has been examined, for example, by Brooks Bouson, who analyses the jazz-like narrative structure of the novel and relates it to the experiences of its main characters. Other critics referenced in this thesis include Drucilla Cornell, whose views on *Jazz* from the point of view of women's rights help illustrate the stigmatisation aspect of this thesis.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

Art, poetry and literature created by African American people were flourishing in large American cities during the Harlem Renaissance. The period consisted of multiple well-known African American poets and authors, such as Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston, as well as jazz musicians such as Duke Ellington, who once called Harlem “the world’s most glamorous atmosphere” (Shaw 57-9). The Harlem Renaissance was, however, the time of the second wave of Jim Crow and racial segregation (Smethurst 190), which means that these authors and artists were working and creating during a time of distress and uncertainty. The 1920s occurred immediately after the period of the Great Migration, during which millions of African American people migrated to large Northern cities, this being the main premise for Morrison’s *Jazz*. Hundreds of thousands of African Americans moved to Northern cities in search of safety, economic opportunities, and work (Downs 438), but moving to large Northern cities was also a cultural decision for many. These cities attracted a large number of migrants to their emerging black communities, which had notable effects on the cities’ scenes of music, art, poetry and dance. The Great Migration is thus a central component in the Harlem Renaissance (Downs 439). Harlem, in particular, was a scene for artists, creators and intellectuals, and was thus a popular destination to migrate to. Harlem was known as a “promised land” of sorts for black Southerners; it not only promised safety and economic possibilities, but a new identity as citizens of the United States as well (Downs 439). Harlem is, then, an apt place to tell a story that centres itself around the importance of music in black experiences, because music has historical importance in describing and expressing them.

Music has been used by African American artists, authors and poets to signify protest, struggle, frustration, and the fight for freedom for centuries. In the eighteenth century, most slave states prohibited slaves from using instruments or even “loud sounds”, because slave owners were afraid the music signified rebellion, as if slaves producing musical sounds were planning something with it or calling out to each other (Peretti 6). While there is little written documentation or study of

slave music before the 1860s, there are nonetheless some eyewitness accounts describing slave music, which state that the songs of slaves in the South often expressed not necessarily rebellion as much as endurance to their conditions; the songs alleviated some of the burden they were forced to face. However, it is also probable that slaves were made to sing against their will, so the songs often expressed despair. This view is supported, for example, by Frederick Douglass, who has written that slave songs were a form of relief from the despair slaves faced (Peretti 6-7). There were also expressions of rebellion and desire for freedom coded in work songs played outside work hours, and these coded messages continue to be present in African American music. There were clear differences in the black music scenes in Northern and Southern states, which mainly related to opportunities to make and perform music. These work songs in the South and commercial music in the North together formed the foundation for the future of black popular music. (Peretti 8). Music by African American people, then, has a history of signifying struggle and protest, which has its documented roots in the era of slavery.

At the start of the nineteenth century, slavery was still the norm for black life, especially in the South. Even when slavery was abolished soon after, the United States remained extremely discriminatory to its black citizens. Segregation, lynchings and unequal justice prevailed all over the United States, especially in Southern states (Peretti 4; Vincent 30). These aspects of black life in the late nineteenth century are present in *Jazz* and are expressed through the characters' backstories; the three main characters of the novel all have traumatic pasts relating to their life in the South. Before moving up North, Violet and Joe Trace met while working on a plantation before gathering up enough money to move, Violet accounts memories of her mother's living conditions and her suicide, and Dorcas' parents were murdered by white rioters in East St. Louis before she had the opportunity to move up North with her aunt. As can be seen from the analysis of her character, her traumatic past influences the decisions she makes, alongside with the important aspect of music.

The end of the nineteenth century and the dawn of the twentieth century held significant

changes to the lives of African American people. Families had the chance to migrate from plantations, and educational opportunities, urban black communities and skilled black professionals multiplied, all alongside with the black music scene. Music supported the daily struggle of black people at the time. It was both commercial and religious; spirituals, for example, were reminiscent of slavery and reminded black listeners of poverty, segregation and discrimination, but the songs looked forward to a better future, helping to make it “a powerful presence in African American culture” (Peretti 4-5). Show business was also emerging as an industry in the North, and black performers found audiences there. However, white discrimination of the black music scene persisted even in the North, which lends weight to the stigmatisation aspect of this thesis. Most Southern African Americans were suffering from poverty and the lack of educational opportunities, and new segregation laws did not permit them to vote. Black musicians suffered along with them; black performers were discriminated against and ridiculed by journalists in the press, singers were banned from performing in certain venues and entering others through the front door, and black musicians were frequent targets of mob attacks. There was, however, success for some black performers, and musicians were turning their music into a “coded form of protest” to fight against white discrimination. (Peretti 13).

As a result of the success of black musicians and due to the musical groundwork laid out by them in the past (Vincent 36), jazz music begun to be popular in the 1920s. While white discrimination toward black musicians was rampant, this did not stop jazz music from being played in popular venues all over the country and being enjoyed by white audiences. Jazz music was also adopted by white musicians, which was a part of the reason for its strong emergence in New York, and the term “jazz” had become common usage by 1918. Jazz was moulded and transmitted by the oral tradition; it was heard in recordings, after-hour clubs and on the streets of New York. Jazz developed a “call and response” pattern that resembled conversation (Galm 613), which relates to the black oral tradition as well. Anne-Marie Paquet-Deyris notes that this call and response aspect is

found in the narration of *Jazz*, because music is so deeply woven into the themes of the novel (Paquet-Deyris 227); she states that the narration has the same flow as jazz music, which further demonstrates the importance of music in the novel. Bouson also notes the importance of the jazz-like structure of the novel and discusses how Morrison thought the structure was crucial to highlight both the importance of jazz to black culture and its implications of “sex, violence and chaos” (Bouson 164), which relates to the stigmatisation of the music at the time.

Music was, in fact, everywhere in Harlem by the turn of the decade, which becomes clear in Morrison’s narrative as well. One factor for this was the migration of Southern black people to New York, and another factor was the segregation of said black people; black citizens mostly lived in the upper-north-eastern part of New York – Harlem. Many black musicians were forbidden from entering classical music organizations, conservatories and orchestras, and they had to commute from Harlem to Broadway to play in clubs, ballrooms, and theaters. After-hours clubs developed mostly to accommodate their commute (Galm 612). These clubs will be discussed in relation to Dorcas in the following section.

### **3. The Role of Music in *Jazz***

This section of the thesis will discuss how the roles of music in Morrison’s *Jazz* relate to African American experiences in Harlem during the 1920s. *Jazz* depicts music in the role of highlighting black self-expression and the newly found freedom for black men and women, but it also has a role of stigmatising black culture in the city. Freedom and self-expression will be discussed from the point of view of individual freedom and group freedom, mainly individual self-expression and protest. The second part, stigmatisation, will discuss these aspects as well, but from a more negative point of view; Morrison describes the novel’s characters as driven and determined to seek better lives due to their pasts in the South, and the city offers them what they were looking for, but they also come to face more discrimination, stigmatisation and violence (Bouson 164). This discrimination comes in the form of how the media portrays jazz music to stigmatize black



musicians and black behavior in general, the attitudes toward music as something dangerous to young women, and how music, in its own way, is portrayed as justifying and being the cause for violence in the case of Joe Trace. Music is, then, used in the novel as a tool to express both positive and negative aspects of black city life.

### **3.1. Music as a Tool of Self-expression and Freedom**

When African American people moved to New York City from the South at the start of the twentieth century, they were met with an increased feeling of freedom; the freedom to earn more money, to buy housing, to start their new lives in peace, start families and find new ways of self-expression. This created a stark contrast between the South and the previous conditions and allowed behaviors they were used to. Violet and Joe Trace move to the city together as a couple, and they experience this sense of freedom strongly even before they arrive at their destination. Their first contact with the freedom of the city starts on the train ride; they spend the last half of their way to New York dancing on the train, to imaginary music only they can hear: “Joe stood up, his fingers clutching the baggage rack above his head. He felt the dancing better that way, and told Violet to do the same. They were hanging there, a young country couple, laughing and tapping back at the track . . . ” (30). It can be argued that the narrator is implying that this is the first instance of *Jazz* depicting music and dance as being used as a tool for experiencing freedom; Violet and Joe, as well as many other black passengers on the train, spent the first half of the trip feeling nervous, but once the train moves closer to the city, they are excited about and hopeful for the possibilities New York will have for them. The couple, then, imagines the shaking of the train tracks as music to dance to on the way to their new life.

Music is frequently referenced in the narration and it is the driving force through which people migrating to the city experience it. Music is everywhere and is woven into almost every description of the cityscape: “Up there, in that part of the City – which is the part they came for – the right tune whistled in a doorway or lifting up from the circles and grooves of a record can

change the weather. From freezing to hot to cool” (51). The narrator often describes the city streets filled with music and lively clubs: “And if that’s not enough, doors to speakeasies stand ajar and in that cool dark place a clarinet coughs and clears its throat waiting for the woman to decide on the key” (64). The city holds a possibility for freedom and a bright future, and the romantic nature of the city is depicted through music at almost every turn. The narrator makes music feel like it is the main thing that attracts people to the city in the first place; the narrator notes that Harlem is “the part that they came for”, implying that the people that migrated to Harlem came precisely for the musical aspect of the neighborhood.

Another type of individual freedom *Jazz* depicts is the freedom for women to express themselves and act more independently. A strong example of this in *Jazz* is Dorcas. Dorcas is a young woman who moved to the city as a child at the turn of the century after both of her parents had been killed in the East St. Louis riots. Back then, she witnessed a march on Fifth Avenue with her aunt Alice. Like Alice, it moved her deeply, but she draws different conclusions about the beating of the drums:

Resisting her aunt’s protection and restraining hands, Dorcas thought that life-below-the-sash as all the life there was. The drums she heard at the parade were only the first part, the first word, of a command. For her the drums were not an all-embracing rope of fellowship, discipline and transcendence. She remembered them as a beginning, a start of something she looked to complete (60).

While Alice sees the drums on Fifth Avenue as a sign of solemn connection between black citizens, Dorcas finds the freedom and the courage in them to start living her life the way she wants to. Even as a child, she finds an opportunity for a completely new beginning for herself in the city. After the traumatic experience of losing her parents, she is, for the first time, out on her own in a new place, simultaneously carrying her past in the South with her and trying to find courage in it: “She watched the black unblinking men, and the drums assured her that the glow would never leave her, that it would be waiting for her and with her whenever she wanted to be touched by it” (60). The

music of the jazz age often helped people who had not previously experienced freedom “claim ownership” of their bodies and experiences (Bouson 164). This is true for Dorcas; she is touched by this music, just like her aunt, but the message is different; the message to Dorcas is to listen to herself and take ownership of her own life.

Music enters Dorcas’ everyday life mostly through entertainment and night clubs. The narrator describes the role music has in the lives of people who visit these clubs: “They believe they know before the music does what their hands, their feet are to do, but that illusion is the music’s secret drive: the control it tricks them into believing is theirs; the anticipation it anticipates” (65). Control over her own identity and expression is indeed important to Dorcas, who is desperate to break free from her aunt and be her own person. She describes her life as “unbearable” on multiple occasions (63, 67), and decides to rebel against the restrictions that her aunt places on her by seeking out excitement and new experiences. She starts a three-month long affair with Joe, an older man who sells cosmetics to her aunt and her friends. Nobody in her life knows she is having this affair, from which she derives great pleasure at first. After their short-lived affair, however, Dorcas ends up leaving Joe to go to an underground club with a friend and some men her own age, because Joe, too, ends up restricting her freedom. At one part of their relationship, Dorcas talks about wanting to go out to a club to dance with Joe, but Joe is afraid they would be seen together, and does not like the idea anyway, because the music there is “too loud” and he seems jealous when Dorcas says that “the boys who play sometimes get up and dance with you” (39). Dorcas wanting to go to this club is an example of breaking free from what people expect of her. She also describes the club as a black space, where “no whitepeople can get in” (39), and it is apparent from her speech that Dorcas and Joe have already been there together before. The difference in their relationship is that she wants to be seen, wants to express herself, while Joe wants to be with her in secret and stay indoors, and perhaps because he is battling jealousy and insecurity, wants to keep her completely to himself. Dorcas realizes at a certain point that she wants to experience life outside of the four walls

of his secret apartment, and the first thing she does is go to another club, explicitly because she wants to hear music and dance. This club is a safe black space, which would be appealing to a young black woman wanting to experience the city. It is also more directed toward young people, whereas the club Dorcas and Joe went to previously was more of an elegant jazz club where they had to be careful to be spotted together. For Dorcas, this party is what she needs to get away from the constraints of both her aunt and Joe.

*Jazz* does not only depict music as an individual experience of freedom and hope; it is also used as a tool for black protest and the fight for civil rights: “Alice Manfred stood for three hours on Fifth Avenue marvelling at the cold black faces and listening to drums saying what the graceful women and the marching men could not... It was July in 1917 and the beautiful faces were cold and quiet; moving slowly into the space the drums were building for them” (53). Alice Manfred, Dorcas’ aunt, is witnessing the silent march of 1917, which is known as the first mass protest organized by African Americans. On July 28, 1917, ten thousand people marched to protest the lynching and the police treatment of black people across the Southern states. The march was held specifically in response to the violent riots in East St. Louis, where white mobs killed black people and burned down their houses (Finley). Since this was a silent protest, the only sound to accompany the protest was the beat of the drums. Alice thinks the drums are conveying “what the graceful women and the marching men could not”. As discussed above, music has been used throughout African American history as a tool for protest, and even though the drums on Fifth Avenue do not constitute as blues or jazz music, they illicit a strong feeling of connection in Alice: “Then suddenly, like a rope cast for rescue, the drums spanned the distance, gathering them all up and connected them: Alice, Dorcas, her sister and her brother-in-law, the Boy Scouts and the frozen black faces, the watchers on the pavement and those in the windows above” (58). Alice finds solace in the faces of the black protesters, and the drums put it all in focus for her: they are all fighting for their rights and freedom together.

### 3.2. Music and the Stigmatisation of Black Culture

Music is used as a tool for expressing freedom, self-expression and protest in the black community, but *Jazz* also depicts music in the role of stigmatising black culture, as noted above. The negative aspect of blues and jazz music is best described, again, by Dorcas' aunt Alice. Even though Alice finds solace in the drums of the protest on Fifth Avenue, she has serious concerns and fears regarding how music affects people and causes trouble in her community. Her distaste for this music mostly revolves around the overtly sexual behavior that she thinks it encourages in young black women:

[T]he music was getting worse and worse with each passing season the Lord waited to make Himself known. Songs that used to start in the head and fill the heart had dropped on down, down to places below the sash and the buckled belts. Alice thought the lowdown music had something to do with the silent black women and men marching down Fifth Avenue to advertise their anger over two hundred dead in East St. Louis, two of whom were her sister and brother-in-law, killed in the riots (56-57).

There are two issues that Alice brings up in this paragraph. Firstly, Alice mentions the sexual aspect of this music. Regarding Dorcas, she thinks that it tempts young black women to "live a little" (188), act in a way that they are not supposed to, thus putting themselves in real danger. Her fears are not unfounded; her niece is, after all, killed in an underground club that most likely plays this type of music. Thus, Alice fears that there is a real danger in young black women going out to nightclubs and expressing their sexuality. As Bouson notes, jazz music is a metaphor for the culture that black migrants brought to the city from the South, but it also means actual jazz music, which is depicted as being partly at fault for Dorcas' death (Bouson 165). What is being blamed here, then, is not only the tempting and alluring music, the "dirty, get-on-down music" (58), but black culture itself. Bouson continues: "*Jazz* seemingly sympathizes with Dorcas' bluesy sexuality, but it also

preassigns the sexually transgressive Dorcas the cultural – and literary – role of murder victim” (Bouson 179). By doing this, the novel further emphasizes the two roles of music in Dorcas’ life: music allows her to express her identity and sexuality, but it is simultaneously partially responsible for the way she dies.

The second part of the quotation mentions “the silent black women and men marching down Fifth Avenue”. What Alice means is the protest of the black citizens of East St. Louis, including Dorcas’ parents, who lost their lives in the hands of white rioters. Alice identifies a connection between two very different aspects of black urban culture: the underground nightclub scene where her niece had been killed, and the serious aspect of protest and fighting for civil rights. However, she discusses both in a negative and fearful way; while protest music was discussed in the context of freedom and black self-expression before, it now has an aspect of stigmatisation.

Drucilla Cornell notes that Alice is fearful of the music partly because the press and the white media of twentieth-century Harlem often blamed jazz and blues, “race music”, for black women’s “sexual and social disorder” (Cornell 41-42). Alice herself is a black woman, but she is afraid of the attitude toward jazz music in her surroundings, because it is viewed as something negative and harmful in the media that she avidly consumes; According to Alice, jazz music is partly responsible for her niece’s death, and for the inappropriate and dangerous behavior of black citizens in general. Cornell further claims that Alice has a distaste for this music, because the media obstructed it in a way that makes black people seem “angry, appetite driven and sexualized in the extreme” (Cornell 42-43). Thus, the music and what it stands for was represented in a negative way in the predominantly white media, which stigmatises black culture and black behavior, were it protesting or only singing and dancing or going out to night clubs to dance and have fun. The public opinion on jazz music becomes more apparent from the following quotation: “She knew from sermons and editorials that it wasn’t real music – just colored folks’ stuff: harmful, certainly; embarrassing, of course; but not real, not serious. Yet Alice Manfred swore she heard a complicated

anger in it; something hostile that disguised itself as flourish and roaring seduction” (59). Alice’s opinions reflect the opinions of the general white public, which becomes apparent from her quoting “sermons and editorials”. The opinion that jazz music is just “colored folks’ stuff” she internalizes straight from the media. This works to minimize the influence of jazz music in the lives of black citizens, while simultaneously portraying it as something that causes violence and disorder. By blaming black music, the media is really blaming and stigmatizing black behavior and black culture.

Music does not only affect the women of the novel, but it is also referenced in regard to the act of violence done by Joe Trace. Dorcas and Joe enter a secret relationship when Joe delivers cosmetics to Alice’s door one day. He quickly becomes infatuated with Dorcas, and his love eventually turns into obsession, fear, and jealousy. As mentioned in the previous section, Dorcas leaves Joe due to the restrictions he places on her and finds more excitement and freedom in an underground club. Dorcas regards going out to these night clubs as an expression of her own freedom and identity as a young woman in the city, but it fills Joe with fear and jealousy. Furthermore, Joe’s feelings are born from something outside of himself, some sort of outside forces that make him jealous and violent. The narrator and Joe himself cite the city and music as the forces that urge him on to find Dorcas and worry excessively about losing her. He seeks her out at a hair salon she frequents, where two men are playing music, and reflects on his jealous thoughts: “I dismissed the evil in my thoughts because I wasn’t sure that the sooty music the blind twins were playing wasn’t the cause. It can do that to you, a certain kind of guitar playing. Not like the clarinets, but close. If that song had been coming through a clarinet, I’d have known right away. But the guitars – they confused me, made me doubt myself, and I lost the trail” (132). Like Dorcas, Joe feels something in the music that makes him think he is “free to do something wild” (Bouson 165), and he does. In that moment, Joe feels as if the music that seems to be surrounding him all over the city is pushing him to do something over which he has no control.

The narrator claims that the city manipulates people to the point where they have no control over their own actions, even when they think they do: “Take my word for it, he is bound to the track. It pulls him like a needle through the groove of a Bluebird record. Round and round about the town. That’s the way the City spins you. Makes you do what it wants, go where the laid-out roads say to. All the while letting you think you’re free” (120). Thus, the influence to do something violent comes from outside of himself; before his act of violence, Joe is described as a kind, neighborly man, who would not do anybody any harm. Furthermore, Joe prides himself on not being like other men, which is how he justifies his affair with Dorcas: “Any other man be running around, stepping out every night, you know that. I ain’t like that. I ain’t” (49). These other men, who the narrator calls “Thursday men” (49-50), seek excitement in the city and are perhaps similarly swayed by it to do “wild” things, and Joe is convinced he does not want to be like them. Thus, the conclusion that Joe’s actions are influenced by music and the city in the novel is justified by previous descriptions of his personality and character.

The narrator claiming that music is at fault for Joe’s actions is not to be taken literally, however. By focusing on villainizing the music of the city in this way, the narrator of *Jazz* is showing, again, the extent that the music is villainized by the public and the media and internalized by Joe and Alice. As discussed earlier, Alice has internalized these mainstream attitudes and is convinced that music has a harmful effect on people and makes them think they can “do something wild”. This belief emerges in the way Joe’s actions are portrayed later in the novel – as completely spurred on by music. However, Alice is mainly afraid of the effect music could have on her young niece, but the narrator only focuses on the negative effects music has on Joe Trace’s behavior. Thus, Joe’s actions are a reflection of Alice’s fears, which are born from the negative and discriminatory portrayals of the black music scene in the media.

After some time has passed since Dorcas’ death, Joe thinks of his violent actions in an almost romantic, bluesy manner. When he is sadly staring out the window of his apartment, he takes



note of a blues singer singing on the street outside his apartment and relates to the song he is playing: “Blues man. Black and blues man. Blacktherefore blue man. Everybody knows your name. Where-did-she-go-and-why man. So-lonesome-I-could-die man” (119). The narrator notes that Joe sees his current situation through the man and the blues he is singing: “The singer is hard to miss, sitting as he does on a fruit crate in the center of the sidewalk – Joe probably thinks the song is about him. He’d like believing it” (119). Joe relates his current situation to this sorrowful music and sees himself almost as a victim of the city and the way it controls its inhabitants, like the narrator described earlier. He spends his days sitting at the window of his apartment crying over a girl he killed, thinking about her in terms of a blues song: “where-did-she-go-and-why man”.

The point to be made here is that Joe further strengthens Alice Manfred’s view that this “sooty music” affects people’s actions and mental states in a negative way. Alice’s worry, then, does not only extend to Dorcas, but also to the actions of people, mainly men, who are likely to hurt her. In Bouson’s terms, *Jazz* does this to evoke the “inter- and intraracist stereotype of the lower-class black male as prone to criminal acts of violence” (Bouson 165), as well as stereotypes concerning black female sexuality, both of which are present in Alice’s mind. These negative stereotypes are both strongly bound to music in the novel; Dorcas, free to do something wild, acts on her newly found freedom and sexuality through sneaking out to night clubs, which Alice deems dangerous. Joe, on the other hand, is at first completely helpless against the push of the music all around the city, and later sees his actions almost through a blues aesthetic, as if violence and sorrow were a part of how the music functions. These stereotypes both live in Alice’s mind, which is filled with things she has internalized from the media and the white public. It can be argued, then, that the narrative focuses on these negative stereotypes to draw attention to how the public and the media stigmatise black culture when it comes to music. Negative stereotypes are also focused on to highlight how these racist attitudes are internalized in the novel’s characters.

#### 4. Conclusion

This thesis has argued that Toni Morrison's *Jazz* portrays music during the Harlem Renaissance as having two distinct roles in the lives of the novel's main characters: it works as a tool of freedom of new opportunities and self-expression, but it is also used to represent the stigmatisation that black citizens face at the same time, especially the discrimination black women face for their new-found freedom of sexuality and individuality.

Music manifests itself in the lives of all the novel's characters in slightly different ways, but the two roles of music in the novel consistently stay the same. The people focused on in this thesis were Alice Manfred, her niece Dorcas, and Joe Trace. When Joe and his wife Violet first migrated to the city, they saw it as an opportunity to create new lives and better opportunities for themselves, which often becomes apparent through music; music frequently lives in the background of the novel's narration and shows how these two characters experience the city. The narrator mentions music when describing the city at almost every turn and connects it to the sense of newly found freedom that Joe and Violet feel. This is connected to individual experiences of freedom in the novel. Another positive individual experience discussed in this thesis is that of Dorcas, who thinks of music as a way to express herself, her newly found identity and sexuality in the city. Dorcas connects music to breaking free from the control that her aunt Alice has on her, as well as escaping her unhealthy relationship with Joe. Music, then, also represents the newfound freedom of young black women living in the city.

The second role of music in *Jazz* is to show how music is used to stigmatise African American people and culture. Music has many positive connotations to Dorcas, but the novel also portrays it as a cause for her death, which is pointed out by her aunt Alice. In fact, most negative effects of music in the novel can be seen through the eyes of Alice, who works as a commentator of events and judges music to be the cause for her niece's death and the general unacceptable jazz scene that comes with black culture. Even though Alice has had positive experiences with music

herself, relating it to black protest and the fight for civil rights, she takes issue with the jazz scene because of reasons relating strongly to race and sexuality and deems the behavior it causes to be immoral. Her opinions are reflected in Joe, who murders Alice's niece in an underground night club out of rage and jealousy. This thesis has shown, then, that the experiences of Alice and Joe work to create an image of music as something that causes disorder and immoral behavior, especially among the black population of Harlem; jazz music is tied to black culture, and black culture is subsequently blamed for the disorder that the music causes. *Jazz* focuses on these negative stereotypes to bring into light the discrimination from the media and white public, as well as the internalized racist attitudes that these two characters exhibit.

In conclusion, this thesis has found that the role of music in *Jazz* is to represent the complexity of African American life in the early twentieth century; the 1920s in the Northern United States offered an abundance of new opportunities, as well as culture, art, and music, but the aspect of discrimination and racism was still present even in Northern cities. Morrison uses jazz music to showcase both these aspects of African American history and existence.

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